

How to Measure Link Building ROI via @martinibuster



It's been my understanding that there is no way to measure the return on investment (ROI) of link building. But some say that it's possible to measure.

Difficulty of Measuring Results of Link Building

It's commonly assumed that the goal of building links is links. But the real goal of link building is sales.

Links are not the end goal. Links are the means to the end goal, which is sales.

That's why viral link strategies have always, in my opinion, been among the worst link building tactics.

Viral links, where someone creates content around a stunt, content that is funny, outrageous or awe inspiring typically results in a tremendous amount of links when done

successfully.

But the links are not directly relevant to the topic of a website and are not relevant to the goal of creating sales.

An example of stunt content is when a business creates a “worlds biggest” or “world’s ugliest” activity or event. But viral stunt content results in links that are irrelevant to the business and almost never results in a ranking lift because the links are 100% off topic.

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Making the end goal quantity of links is a poor way to measure success. The measure of link building success is how much sales have increased since the link building activity began.

So, if we’re going to introduce ROI into the activity of link building, obviously it must be focused on sales. Sales are the “Return” that is referenced in the phrase “Return on Investment.”

Google is a Black Box

How can a person directly attribute with 100% confidence that a specific link or twenty links or a hundred links are responsible for a change in rankings?

There is a curtain between us and Google.

We see what comes out (in the search results) but we do not see what caused that result to happen.

In real terms, we cannot say that a specific link had a specific outcome.

Unless you only built one link, it’s possible to make the claim that the one link caused an increase in sales.

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Although you can't correlate a link or group of links with the accuracy of something like pay per click, there are still ways to give attribution.

Similarly, if you build fifty or a hundred links, if the site starts ranking better, odds are that the links are responsible.

At that point, when the site starts ranking, the ROI is going to be poor because sales haven't caught up to what it cost to pay for those links.

But after a certain point that equation changes and what you paid to obtain those links (and content), the ROI begins to turn in favor of the link builder and as the sales keep coming the ROI is better and better.

Link Building ROI Can Be Tracked

So, in my way of looking at it, it's not possible to make a direct attribution of which links helped move the dial on rankings.

However one can make a general assumption that because links were built and sales subsequently improved, there is a strong correlation between the two activities.

While it's not a certainty, the ROI can still be calculated.

Link and SEO Expert Debra Mastaler

I asked Debra Mastaler (@debramastaler) about the ROI of links because she's someone with a deep understanding of all aspects of SEO.

She provided good advice on how to use analytics to track the ROI of links.

This is what Debra said:

“Yes, you can measure ROI if you look beyond search engine results for justification. Link building campaigns are (generally) launched for one of three reasons, to support ongoing SEO efforts, to attract media links or to build topical authority.

If you only look at rankings and assume your links pushed you up or down, you are not looking at true link value since rankings are determined by what you do and what competitors around you are doing.

Use your analytics program to track things like bounce rate, new visits, time on site, etc. These metrics help you understand what kind of traffic your links are attracting.

You can also leverage data about the types of people coming into your site by using advanced segmentation options such as demographics and first visit date.

If you get a good idea which links are sending certain types of people and traffic, you will have a BIG advantage in pitching topically focused content in the future.

Tracking referral data and using it to your advantage goes a long way to establishing ROI on a link campaign.”

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Debra offered other metrics to track that can provide insights from metrics beyond sales. Those metrics can give an indication that the link building is having a positive effect.

That's great information!

Tracking ROI from Links

It's important to keep an eye how much you are spending for links. That means the cost of outreach and the cost of creating content.

Next you need to keep track of sales and match both the sales and the link building cost month by month.

Tracking the ROI of links can be uncertain because there is the matter of how potent the links are. Sometimes it can take a year before the links take effect because of the kinds of links obtained. Sometimes the the effect is fairly immediate.

<http://tracking.feedpress.it/link/13962/13689301>